

REFLECTIONS
ON THE
COMMON ENGLISH VERSION
OF THE
SCRIPTURES.

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COMMON ENGLISH VERSION

SCRIPTURE

THE BIBLE

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REFLECTIONS
ON THE *K Bible :-*
Old & New Test -
COMMON ENGLISH VERSION *(app.)*
OF THE
SCRIPTURES,
AND ON THE
NECESSITY OF ITS BEING REVISED BY AUTHORITY.
A P O E M.

L O N D O N :
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M D C C L X X X V I I I .



P R E F A C E.

THE author of the following short poem, fully convinced of the beneficial consequences which would arise from a revival, by authority, of the common English version of the Scriptures, is desirous of persuading others to a serious examination of the subject: and he has chosen the present mode of expressing his sentiments, as likely to derive, from the novelty of its application to this topic, a fairer chance of engaging attention. He is not vain enough to suppose that any thing which he may be able to advance, will of itself prove his opinion to be well founded; but he is willing to indulge hopes of inducing his readers to consult other writers, whose arguments, he trusts, will be satisfactory.

As poetical composition does not admit of that logical train of reasoning, illustrated by a detail of instances,

B

by

by which alone the question under consideration ought finally to be decided; the author earnestly requests every person, on whom the subsequent pages shall make the slightest impression, to peruse, among other publications on this head, the Dissertation prefixed to Bishop Lowth's Translation of Isaiah; the Preliminary Remarks accompanying the Versions of Jeremiah by Mr. Blayney, and of the Minor Prophets by Bishop Newcome; Dr. Geddes's Prospectus of a new Translation of the Bible, with his subsequent Letter to the Bishop of London; and, above all, Dr. Kennicott's Remarks on Select Passages of the Old Testament, together with the Sermons subjoined to them. He feels assured that Professor White's Sermon on a revival of our translation, which he has not been able to procure, ought to be added to the preceding list.

R E F L E C T I O N S, &c.

BLEST be the hour when Truth resistless broke
 The iron bands of Superstition's yoke;
 When gospel-knowledge once again reveal'd
 Her sacred source, and all her springs unseal'd;
 Bade them their ancient course resume, and haste 5
 With healing freshness to the barren waste.
 Onward they flow; awakening lands rejoice:
 Hark to the loud acclaim, loud as the voice
 Of hosts triumphant in the glorious strife,
 From nations panting for the streams of life! 10

V. 3. (when gospel-knowledge). At the Reformation, when the Scriptures were published in most European languages.

With out-stretch'd arms, and keen impatient eye,
 Lo, Albion joins the universal cry.
 Her Monarch gives the word ; at his command
 The mounds are broken ; o'er the parched land
 Flows the swift tide of truth from shore to shore ; 15
 While through the woods, and vales, and mountains hoar,
 Millions unwearied the glad notes prolong,
 Hymning Jehovah in their native tongue.

Blest be thy memory, James ; to thee we owe
 The beams unveil'd of heaven's own light below ! 20
 Blest be the toil, which, freed from Rome's disguise,
 Celestial truth display'd to British eyes ;
 In Britain's genuine sounds proclaim'd aloud
 The high behest, and led her sons to God !
 That hallow'd lore my childhood wond'ring heard, 25
 When scarce my tongue sustain'd the cumbrous word ;
 That

That lore my youth with joy alternate fir'd,
 And chill'd with grief; reveal'd how man aspir'd
 To equal God by Eden's fatal tree;
 Taught how the Saviour died, and died for me; 30
 Disclos'd the grace to sinful mortals given,
 And cheer'd my heart, and bade me hope for heaven.

Yet canst thou, Truth, forsake thy native skies,
 And dwell on earth unstain'd? See Danube rise
 Pure and pellucid from his rocky source; 35
 But when through distant climes he winds his course,
 Ting'd and more ting'd from ev'ry realm he laves
 And fills with plenty, roll his turbid waves.
 O! couldst thou hope in this tempestuous vale
 Thy light, midst gathering clouds and vapours pale, 40
 Unfullied still should spread from age to age?
 And can I cease to mourn, when o'er thy page

V. 42. (o'er thy page). See Lowth's Prelim. Dissertation, p. 59, for an account of the corruptions in the Hebrew text.

I mark how Time's unsparing hand hath strewn
 Th' impervious blot, the character unknown?
 Sooner may filial eyes un pitying trace 45
 The shades of sickness in a parent's face!

These ancient stains on Albion's tome imprest,
 (O that no more her sacred tome confest!)
 Dim its fair face. When pious zeal explores
 The paths of duty in these hallow'd stores, 50
 Oft weighs th' untutor'd mind in keen suspense
 The dubious precept; where the labouring sense,
 As breaks through wintry clouds the struggling day,
 Through the dark phrase obscurely wins its way.
 How oft ev'n learning's penetrating eye, 55
 The heavenly mandate eager to descry,
 Notes each ambiguous word, each varying strain,
 And strives to pierce the gloom, but strives in vain!

How

[II]

How oft, in deep'ning mists involv'd, expire
 The Psalmist's rapture, and the poet's fire! 60
 How oft, with lifted arms and eyes of flame,
 When the rapt seer on Babel's hated name
 Launches God's vengeance, in its mighty course
 The latent error breaks his thunder's force!
 I hear yon taunting infidel deride 65
 The gospel-page; I hear blaspheming pride
 Infult my Saviour;—"Search your tome divine,
 "Shew that your Christ should spring from David's line."
 O ye, whose labours grateful Britons praise
 Whene'er that tome they view, in devious maze 70

V. 67. (search your tome divine). The promise that Christ should descend from the lineage of David is given in 2 Sam. chap. vii. and in the parallel place 1 Chron. chap. xvii. and to these parts of Scripture every subsequent writer of the Old and New Testament, who mentions the promise, constantly alludes. But our vulgar translation of them is so extremely inaccurate and obscure, that Collins peremptorily denies them to be in the slightest degree applicable to the Messiah; and it is nearly, if not absolutely, impossible to refute his objections, without having recourse to the original Hebrew. In the first of Dr. Kennicott's sermons, subjoined to his Remarks on Select Passages of the Old Testament, the question is fully discussed, and the true rendering of the passages very ably vindicated.

Though

Though darkling oft ye wander, oft prolong
 The sneering sceptic's triumph, shall my tongue
 With harsh reproaches load your erring pen?
 No; be your memory sacred; ye were men;
 And ignorance o'er the land still strove to fling 75
 Her lingering gloom, and stretch her raven wing.

O happy they, who climb the steep ascent
 Of sacred science, trace with steps intent
 Truth's native source, by holy ardour led
 To quaff her streams in their primæval bed! 80
 Alas, to few 'tis given that bliss to know!
 These living streams, so heaven ordains, must flow
 Through channels form'd by man! Save, mortals, save
 Those channels from pollution! Lo, the wave
 Stagnates—its course, its purity, restore; 85
 Let parched nations drink, and thirst no more!

V. 74. (ye were men.) ἄνθρωπος ἔκαστη προφασίς. Menander.

What

What though beyond the bounds of place and time
 Th' Eternal dwells in solitude sublime,
 Though everlasting clouds and night profound
 The blaze too strong for mortal eyes surround, 90
 From heaven reflected in the sacred line,
 With softer ray beams majesty divine ;
 Shrouding his terrors, the Almighty Lord
 Shines mild and gracious in his holy word :
 There unappall'd our ears his voice receive, 95
 There we behold him face to face, and live !
 Say, unrestrain'd shall error's baleful shade
 This mirror of Jehovah's light invade,
 Forbid our eyes the smiles of grace to scan,
 And bar the intercourse 'twixt God and man ? 100

All hail! ye venerable names, whose toil,
 To noblest ends devoted, from the foil

V. 101. (ye venerable names). The modern restorers of sacred literature.

Of ancient days, from error's dim disguise,
 Redeems the page that leads us to the skies !
 The rude transcriber of the sacred lore 105
 His claim, by you disprov'd, maintains no more ;
 No more we fondly dream that power divine
 Watch'd o'er his pen, and form'd th' unerring line ;
 No more, enslav'd by superstitious fear,
 Delusive points, as marks from heaven, revere. 110
 Lo, to your eager gaze the east unfolds
 Its long-neglected treasures ; nor withholds
 Samaria's law primæval, nor the strains
 Of grace, which erst o'er Aram's listening plains
 Breath'd holy joy, bade rites inhuman cease, 115
 And charm'd Arabia's howling wilds to peace.

V. 110. (delusive points). The Masoretic punctuation.

V. 113 to 116. The Samaritan Pentateuch, as well as the Syriac and Arabic versions of the Bible, which afford signal assistance towards a right interpretation of the Scriptures, were unknown in Europe at the time when our present translation was made. See Kennicott's Introduction to his Remarks, p. 8, 9,

Foremost

Foremost of Britain's truth-exploring train,
 (O when shall Britain see thy like again!)
 Lowth, art thou snatch'd from earth? Yon deep-ton'd bell,
 Whose thunder deigns no common loss to tell, 120
 Starts from its iron sleep with fullen moan,
 And warns the boding land that thou art gone!
 Thou retest from thy labours; thine the doom
 Of endless glory! Yet beyond the tomb
 Thy voice, attun'd to harmony divine, 125
 Till life's pale close my dust to dust consign
 With still augmenting sweetness on my ear
 Shall pour the songs of Sion! Lo, the seer,
 Rous'd at thy call, rears unsubdu'd by time
 His nervous strength and giant-port sublime! 130

V. 119. (yon deep-ton'd bell). The great bell of St. Paul's, tolled only on the death of the diocesan, and on a few other occasions equally solemn.

V. 125. (thy voice). *Prælectiones de Sacra Poesi Hebræorum.*

V. 128. (the seer). *Isaiah.*

Thy zeal the generous flame of truth conveys
 To kindred bosoms ; fans the rising blaze
 Which brightens papal gloom. Thy eagle-glance
 Through paths untried bids Kennicott advance.
 From thy unfading laurel will I twine

135

His well-earn'd wreath, and join his fame to thine.
 Mark his unwearied eye its gaze expand
 O'er furthest Europe, Libya's burning strand,
 Kingdoms whose confines Indian oceans lave,
 And worlds remov'd beyond the western wave.

140

Ver. 132. (kindred bosoms). Bishop Newcome, Mr. Blayney, &c.

—— (rising blaze). Bishop Lowth gave every encouragement to the new translation of the Bible undertaken by Dr. Geddes, a truly respectable catholic, for the use of those of his own persuasion. See Geddes's Prospectus, p. 144; and his Letter to the Bishop of London, p. 72, 73.

V. 134. (bids Kennicott). " This learned prelate (Lowth) led the way to " the correction of the Hebrew text, by having convinced me of its being " much corrupted." Kennicott's Introd. to his Remarks, p. 11. — " Nefas " foret ingrato præterire silentio virum illum, cujus adhortationibus, com- " mendationibus, atque consiliis opus hoc et inchoatum fuit et finitum. Quis " vero nescit gratias omnium, quotquot hinc in sacris suis proficiant studiis, " deberi potissimum Roberto Lowth, Episcopo Londinensi ?" Kenn. Dissert. Gen. p. 128.

V. 138 to 140. See Kennicott's Dissert. Gen. p. 61—66.

Why

Why doth his eye, exclaim th' astonish'd lands,
 Thus range o'er Europe, Libya's burning sands,
 Kingdoms whose confines Indian oceans lave,
 And worlds remov'd beyond the western wave?
 Seeks he Golconda's gems, Potosi's ore, 145
 Sabæa's incense, Afric's ivory store?
 Vain thought! he asks no perishable prize;
 His aim, the genuine treasures from the skies.
 From dark abodes conventual, and the maze
 Of glimmering cells, his hand to light conveys 150
 The long-imprison'd tome. Its sacred page,
 Stain'd with chill damps, and worn by cankering age,
 Patient he turns, sagacious to descry
 Each phrase of varying import; and with eye
 Undim'd, though health her wonted aid refuse, 155
 Twice ten long years th' Herculean toil pursues.

When

V. 155. (though health). "Valetudinem certe, quâ olim fruebar optimâ, laboribus meis posthabui; quæ et nunc mihi, ex perpetuâ illâ animi corporisque defatigatione, incerta admodum facta est et male firma. Nec me tamen aut pœnitet, aut pœnituit unquam provinciæ, quam adornandam in me suscepi." Kenn. Diff. Gen. p. 1.

V. 156. (twice ten long years). "Exacto jam opere, in quod per annos plusquam viginti, studio vix unquam intermisso, totus incubui; Deum im-
" primis.

When shall his toil its treasur'd fruits reveal
 To Albion's humblest offspring! Is the zeal
 Extinct, which erst Religion's hallow'd form
 In British garb array'd? When shall it warm 160
 This later age? Shall learning's dawn outvie
 The glow that brightens her meridian sky?
 Shall Suecia's Lord his wintry deserts cheer
 With heavenly light, and Britain's Sovereign hear
 Th' applauding north unmov'd? Shall Brunswick spurn 165
 The wreath still blooming round a Stuart's urn?

Friend of each generous aim that points to truth,
 Imperial Brunswick, lo! the British youth,

" primis veneror, gratiasque illi ago habeoque maximas; qui et spatium mihi
 " vitæ idoneum, atque etiam vires concessit tanto labori pares." Kenn. Diff.
 Gen. apud Princip.

Ver. 163. (Suecia's Lord). " Honorificum sanè est, quòd rex Sueciæ Au-
 " gustissimus, primus omnium, illustre posuit exemplum; factò mandato, ut
 " inchoaretur Veteris Testamenti examinatio, et accuratissima Versionis Sueciæ
 " Recensio: quòd parata esset ea versio, ut in se admittat commoda, quotquot
 " administraverit hæc variarum lectionum editio. Agnam Britanniam officio
 " suo defuturam esse, nefas foret suspicari." Kenn. Dissert. Gen. p. 129.

Led

Led by thy auspices, with piercing eyes
 Range o'er creation, strip each close disguise 170
 From nature's realms, unfathom'd seas explore,
 Search the lone Isle's inhospitable shore,
 Pursue the comet's devious orb, and trace
 New worlds revolving in unbounded space.
 A nobler task remains; to chase the gloom 175
 That veils the heaven-imparted page, relume,
 Bright as in days of old, the prophet's fire,
 The Psalmist's lays in melody attire,
 Bid blasphemy resign her venom'd store,
 Bid the insidious sceptic sneer no more. 180
 Lo! sacred science (she thy fostering hand
 Long hath rever'd) impatient thy command
 Awaits, the tidings panting to declare,
 And call her sons the glorious toil to share.

Soon

Soon may thy mandate bid her heart rejoice! 185

Soon may her sons, assembling at her voice,

Raise, while they vindicate Jehovah's name,

A column sacred to thy deathless fame.

T H E E N D.